

**Testimony of Erin Pinsky  
Before the Children's Committee**

**Re: SB 2 An Act Concerning Social Equity and the Health, Safety, and Education of  
Children  
March 9, 2021**

Dear Representative Liz Linehan, Senator Saud Anwar, and members of the Children's Committee,

My name is Erin Pinsky and I am a high school educator in my ninth year in the profession. I teach at Region 9, Joel Barlow High School, and I was Barlow's Teacher of the Year in 2019-2020 and a Connecticut State Finalist. I teach AP U.S. History, American Government, and Issues in World Geography.

I understand the proposed bill, SB 2, is considering guaranteeing districts the option of virtual learning in perpetuity. While I appreciate the General Assembly's desire to protect educational standards and provide students and families with access to an education, continuing virtual learning beyond times of emergency would be detrimental to those at the heart of what we do: students. I therefore urge the committee to amend the language of Sections 16, 17, and 18 to specify that virtual learning is not to be an automatic mode of instruction going forward.

Educators have shifted instruction at every point in this crisis to better meet the needs of their students. We are intimately aware of the issues with equity, engagement, access, and accountability that come with remote learning and I admire that SB 2 supports an Internet access grant program. Such a program to guarantee Internet access at schools across the state would enrich the array of resources and platforms school districts have at their disposal for instruction but that should be in support of in-class instruction, not in lieu of.

The result of remote learning is poorer educational outcomes; students are not authentically speaking to each other and often honestly report that they are distracted by other devices, minimizing their learning and the learning of others. I especially worry about this at the high school level when we do not have more years with our students before sending them into collegiate seminar classrooms or onto their career path. Placing a screen between them and their teachers dramatically reduces our ability to cultivate the types of thinkers and learners our society needs in the future.

Further, these cracks in education's foundation become deeper chasms with interrupted and disjointed instruction when teaching in two modalities. Perpetuating the possibility of remote learning also means that students and teachers will always juggle in-person and remote instruction occurring at the same time. In the past year, I have taught in the following models: remotely, hybrid, and all-in. Since remote learning is still an option for students and families, I teach two separate groups of students simultaneously. In-person learning does not automatically transfer online and it cannot be replicated. It is also not as simple as merely displaying the same material in both places. For example, students were asked to peer edit an analytical essay in

pairs. In-person learners had the benefit of asking each other for clarification, conversing about their pieces in a natural flow of conversation that cultivated community along with their writing skills. There is a loss of that community online. Remote learners were in pairs in breakout rooms but had electronic copies of the peer editing rubric and mostly stayed muted, merely typing in feedback to their peer without any interaction. This example and countless others are of grave concern if we consider the social and emotional wellbeing of students. At the high school level we grapple with difficult topics in our disciplines, such as the Connecticut state mandate to teach about genocide, and to have those conversations across a screen reduces a student's ability to process, question, and work through such serious episodes in our history.

Furthermore, remote learning cannot replace in-person learning, nor should there be provisions that would ensure its future. After all the pandemic has brought and the losses incurred, students need school: interpersonal interaction, engagement with peers and teachers, and more varied and richer instructional strategies. When we reduce learning to a series of clicks on a device, we lose the power of small moments in a classroom that make a student feel safe, cared for, and confident. Last year before the pandemic I saw one of AP students struggling not to cry as he stared down at an assessment. This was one of my top performers and I knew something was amiss. It was a quiet moment of distress that had he been bent over a computer screen and not personally in front of me, I would not have sensed. I wrote a message on a Post-It Note that I was proud of him, regardless of his score. I told him I believed that he is more than a grade, more than that number, and that his self-worth was not contingent upon the outcome of that assessment. The look of relief, gratitude, and appreciation brought an immediate change and he squared his shoulders and completed the assessment. He shared a picture of that Post-It Note on his desk as he took his AP exam last May remotely from home and he carries that Post-It Note in his wallet to this day. I know that we often try to quantify educational outcomes but I urge you to consider that the success our schools have with students often cannot be quantified. Please do not eliminate the powerful actions educators around the state take each and every day when they are in the room with their students.

Teaching is a calling and educators have so many tools in our toolbox ready to re-emerge once our health crisis is in a safer realm. Please do not take action based upon the experience of one year alone in an altered setting. I urge you to take my testimony and that of other educators into consideration on this bill. Thank you for your time and your efforts to ensure quality education endures for students in our state.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Erin Pinsky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Erin" written in a large, sweeping loop and the last name "Pinsky" written in a more compact, cursive style.

Erin Pinsky  
Social Studies Teacher  
Region 9 - Joel Barlow High School  
Redding, CT